

REMARKS

The Office Action of October 3, 2003 has been carefully reviewed and these remarks are responsive thereto. Reconsideration and allowance of the instant application are respectfully requested.

Claims 1-31 stand rejected under 35 USC 112, second paragraph, as indefinite. Claims 1, 28, 29, and 31 have been amended to positively recite the customer-side equipment. The claims have been reviewed and amended to correct antecedent basis and other technicalities. Withdrawal of this rejection is requested.

Claims 1-31 stand rejected under 35 USC 101 as directed to non-statutory subject matter. This rejection is traversed.

The claimed invention relates to distribution support equipment configured with a computer system to receive an order placed by a customer for a plurality of merchandise items (or services) at once and provides the merchandise items to the customer through a respective merchandise distribution route previously set for each of the merchandise items or categories of the merchandise item. More specifically, when an order from a customer (identified by a customer's ID) has been received by the computer system, a route specifying means incorporated in the system references a database for merchandise distribution routes (that is, information on dealer, wholesaler, supplier, etc.) set for each of merchandise items or categories of the merchandise items and to separate merchandise distribution routes from one another for each of the ordered merchandise items or categories of the ordered merchandise items in order to specify respective route.

On the other hand, an information processing means acts to transmit respective order signal to dealer, wholesaler, or supplier involved in each of the specified merchandise distribution route as well as to give shipment instructions to different deliverers which deliver the merchandise items from the dealer, wholesaler or supplier to the customer.

This claimed system makes it possible to enhance the efficiency and cost reduction of an overall business dealing while retaining the existing business dealing system in which intermediate distributors (namely, dealer, wholesaler, etc.) are involved to take advantage of the

existing business dealing system. For example, it may not be wise of the supplier to handle all the businesses such as maintenance or sales and marketing of merchandises and/or services normally handled by the dealer or retailer.

The claimed computer system is also capable of performing an automatic management of purchasing of each customer according to preset purchasing management conditions. More specifically, when an order from a customer (identified by a customer's ID) has been received by the computer system, a purchase management means (especially, an approval route management means) incorporated in the system acts to perform purchasing management related to a judgment as to whether or not approval is necessary, a maximum sum of money, approver, approval route and the like according to purchasing regulations stipulated by an organization to which the customer belongs or legal regulations, based on a combination of the customer's ID and the product number of a merchandise item ordered by the customer. For example, a request for approval is automatically forwarded in the form of email or the like to a customer's superior or the head of a department previously appointed as the purchasing management conditions, depending on the category or price of the ordered merchandise item in order to obtain approval thereof.

The claimed system can support a customer, such as a corporation having a group of customers, in conducting centralized purchasing management of individual customer in the corporation.

It is respectfully submitted that the claimed method steps are not an abstract idea, but provide details as to how the distribution support equipment is configured and works. Withdrawal of this rejection is requested.

Claims 1-31 stand rejected as anticipated by Chelliah et al. (US 5,710,887.) This rejection is respectfully traversed.

Claim 1 requires "route specifying means for specifying each of merchandise distribution routes for plural sorts of merchandise by separating one route from another upon receipt of order signals from the customer specified by the customer specifying means to deliver the plural sorts of merchandise to the customer." Claim 29 requires "route specifying means for specifying each

of business transaction routes for plural sorts of services by separating one route from another upon receipt of order signals at a time from the customer specified by the customer specifying means to provide the customer with the plural sorts of services.”

Chelliah does not teach or suggest merchandise distribution or business transaction routes allowing involvement of intermediate distributors intervening between a supplier and a customer, nor that the routes are separated for each of plurality sorts of merchandise items or services ordered by a customer. Chelliah describes an "Order Fulfillment Legacy System 130" in column 17, lines 22-30, item (iv), but provides no description of how the shipment of the selected products to the customer is performed.

Claim 28 requires “purchasing management means for automatically performing purchasing management on a customer-by-customer basis according to preset purchasing management conditions determined by a combination of the customer specified by the customer specifying means and a product number of a merchandise item ordered by the customer.” Claim 31 requires “purchasing management means for automatically performing purchasing management on a customer-by-customer basis according to preset purchasing management conditions determined by a combination of the customer specified by the customer specifying means and sorts of services ordered by the customer.”

Furthermore, Chelliah does not disclose that the system is capable of controlling purchasing authorization. "Promotion Subsystem 162" in column 12, lines 34-42 is merely described as serving promotion based on the customer's demographics or purchasing habits.

Chelliah does not teach each and every element as required under 35 USC 102 and thus cannot anticipate the instant claims. Withdrawal of the instant rejection is requested.

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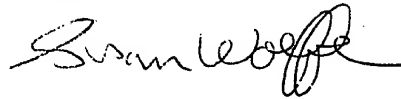
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CONCLUSION

In view of the above amendments and remarks, withdrawal of the rejections and issuance of a Notice of Allowance is requested.

Respectfully submitted,



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